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ABSTRACT

To increase the role and the participation of parents and to strengthen parent involvement in their children's education, the Board of Education of New York City provided funding for a district/or superintendency-level parent liaison pilot program for the 1992-93 school year. The project consisted of the creation of a parent liaison position for a 6-month term. Seven community school districts and one high school superintendency were selected as pilot sites. These sites represented a broad range of school characteristics. Of the five sites responding to the evaluation survey, at least two had achieved their goals for assisting and training parent liaisons, promoting collaboration among parents, teachers, and schools, and helping parents become knowledgeable about children's rights and responsibilities in the school system. Parent liaisons had some difficulty in establishing credibility, but overall responses supported the usefulness of the position. The Office of Educational Research recommends that the program be funded for the 1993-94 school year with a more specific description of the liaison's position. Two tables present survey findings. (SLD)

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ED 378 300

OER Report

DISTRICT PARENT LIAISON PILOT PROGRAM

1992-1993

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DISTRICT PARENT LIAISON
PILOT PROGRAM

1992-1993

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parents are the first educators, and help their children achieve by participating in important decisions about their education. In order to increase the role and participation of parents and to strengthen parent involvement, the Board of Education of the City of New York provided funding for a district/superintendency-level parent liaison pilot program for the 1992-93 school year. The project consisted of the creation of a parent liaison position for a six-month term. Seven community school districts and one high school superintendency were selected to be the sites of the pilot program. The goals of the parent liaison pilot position were to strengthen parent associations, enhance parent involvement at the district level, and build a network of locally based parent advocates.

PROGRAM FINDINGS

The Office of Educational Research, (O.E.R.) conducted an evaluation of the program. Data analysis of program documents, an O.E.R. focus group interview with the liaisons, and survey responses from five district administrators indicated that:

- The eight districts/superintendencies selected to participate in the pilot program represented a broad range of school characteristics. The selected sites were responsible for 237 schools and 212 parent organizations. In addition, all the sites had a history of parent involvement.

- Of the five sites responding to the O.E.R. district survey, at least two, (40 percent) implemented the following goals and objectives. To:

  - assist and train Parent Associations/Parent Teacher Associations,

  - promote collaboration between parents, teachers, and schools, and

  - help parents become knowledgeable about children's rights and responsibilities, and about the school system.

- Parent liaisons used different methods to reach their site's objectives including selecting a number of schools within their districts, and/or working directly with the parent organizations in their districts.

- Activities implemented by parent liaisons included working with parent organizations at four sites; establishment of a

Parent Resource Center at two sites; and serving as conflict mediators at three sites.

- The greatest difficulties faced by parent liaisons in implementing their site's program were building credibility, and clarifying their job responsibilities and accountability to the Office of Parent Involvement (O.P.I.) and their district/superintendency.

- All the program participants--parent liaisons, district administrators, and the O.P.I. coordinators--reported that the newly created position was an asset in promoting parent involvement, and that it should be maintained at their sites and expanded to other districts/superintendencies.

CONCLUSIONS

The Parent Liaison Pilot program was implemented as intended and helped to increase parent involvement in the participating districts/superintendencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these findings, O.E.R. recommends that O.P.I.:

- extend the Parent Liaison pilot program for the 1993-94 school year;

- provide more training conferences;

- improve communication with districts/superintendencies regarding training and other O.P.I. time demands on the liaison; and

- develop a specific job description for the liaisons which includes their accountability to their district/ superintendency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by the Research Unit of the Office of Educational Research, (O.E.R.), New York City Public Schools. As with all reports coming from this unit, this one represents the contributions of many people.

Carolle Charles and the manager of the unit, Ms. Mabel Payne, developed the methods and instruments used in the evaluation. Ms. Charles coordinated the evaluation and analyzed the data. O.E.R. staff collected, compiled, and analyzed field data. Researchers included Pedro Mateu-Gelabert, Pamela Wheaton, and Juilet Whittle.

Valuable assistance for the evaluation research was provided by the Office of Parent Involvement. We wish to thank the Director, Edna Suarez-Colomba, and the Parent Liaison program coordinators. Thanks also go to all the district liaisons, district superintendents, and parent involvement coordinators who participated in the implementation of the Parent Liaison Pilot program; they were most generous with their time and input.

Mabel Payne, manager of the Research Unit/O.E.R., was helpful in supervising the overall evaluation, as well as editing this report. Word processing for this report was done by Renee Moseley and Juilet Whittle.

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I. INTRODUCTION

> We cannot reform our schools alone. Parents are our most important partners in helping students achieve. From principal selection screening committees to school-based management teams, parents have more opportunities now than ever before to participate in important decisions about their children's education.
>
> Joseph Fernandez, Chancellor

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

For the 1992-93 school year, the Board of Education of the City of New York provided funding for a district/superintendency-level parent liaison pilot program. The project consisted of the creation of a parent liaison position for a five-month term, from February 1, 1993 to June 30, 1993. A Chancellor's special circular, in the form of a request for proposals (R.F.P), invited all community school districts, high school superintendencies, and the citywide special education district to submit proposals. The special circular included the following objectives for the parent liaison pilot position: a) strengthening parent associations (P.A./P.T.A.s)*; b) enhancing parent involvement at the district level; and c) building a network of locally-based parent advocates.

Proposal Assessment

In December 1992, the Office of Parent Involvement (O.P.I.) received 17 proposals which were reviewed and ranked by an eight-member board. This review board included two O.P.I. staff members, two parents, one staff member of the Division of Funded Programs, one staff member of the central Bilingual Education

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*Parent Associations (P.A.) and Parent Teacher Associations (P.T.A.) are school-level parent organizations.

Unit, one representative of the Citywide Parent Leadership Group, and one staff member from the office of Community School District Affairs. Eight proposals were selected for funding, based on the merits of the proposals and not by predetermined geographic considerations. A reviewer rating scale was used in the selection process as follows:

1. current parent involvement efforts could receive a rating of up to 10 points,
2. needs assessment statements could receive up to 20 points,
3. objectives/outcomes statements could receive up to 30 points, and
4. proposed activities could be rated up to 40 points.

The eight selected districts/superintendencies scores ranged from 84 to 90, and had an average score of 87.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Participating Districts/Superintendencies

The eight districts and superintendencies selected to participate in the pilot program represented a broad range of characteristics. One of the districts was the citywide special education district. Another was a high school superintendency. Other districts had large concentrations of immigrants, poor families, and ethnically diverse student populations. In total, the eight selected sites were responsible for a total of 237 schools and 212 P.A./P.T.A.s.*

* The number of P.A./P.T.A.s were less than the number of schools because one district had more schools than parent organizations, and another district had five associations that were not functioning.

Parent Liaison Role

As defined in the program guidelines, the parent liaisons were to train parents and promote and enhance parent involvement in their respective district/superintendency. In collaboration with a committee of parents and district and school staff, each district liaison was to develop and coordinate activities that aimed to:

- assist and train P.A./P.T.A.s in understanding the school system;
- enable parents to have a better understanding of the educational system and the rights and responsibilities of students;
- develop parents' skills;
- enable parent liaisons to act as ombudspersons;
- promote collaboration between parents, teachers, and other school staff;
- promote parent and community involvement in the schools; and
- inform parents of the availability of community resources.

O.P.I. Staff Involvement

The parent liaisons started working by February 1. Two O.P.I. staff members coordinated and supervised the activities of the eight parent liaisons. They gave support to the liaisons by organizing training workshops, providing parent involvement resource materials, and monitoring their activities to determine whether each liaison's function was being implemented in a timely fashion. At the end of the pilot period, June 30, 1993, all the parent liaisons were to submit a detailed final report summarizing their achievements.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The Office of Educational Research/O.E.R., formerly the Office of Research Evaluation and Assessment was asked to evaluate the District Parent Liaison Pilot program. The goal of this evaluation was to assess program implementation and program outcomes. O.E.R.'s objectives were to: a) identify each liaison's goals and objectives, and b) describe and evaluate the activities that they developed in order to meet their goals and objectives.

O.E.R. collected data by: a) administering a survey to the eight parent liaisons; b) surveying the district parent coordinator/superintendents; c) conducting a group interview with all liaisons; d) conducting an in-depth interview with two O.P.I. staff members; and e) coding data obtained from district profiles, and program sites' proposals.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This report focuses on the 1992-1993 school year implementation of the District Parent Liaison Pilot program. It describes the characteristics of the sites where the program was implemented, the types of activities organized by each liaison, and the strategies they used to foster parent involvement. The report also identifies some of the limitations/constraints in the development of liaisons' activities. Chapter I provides an introduction to the report and describes the methodology used in the evaluation. Chapter II presents O.E.R. evaluation findings, and Chapter III presents O.E.R.'s conclusions and recommendations.

II. FINDINGS

LIAISON TRAINING

Evaluators participated in and observed the mandatory one-week training session for the new parent liaisons. It was organized by the Office of Parent Involvement and held from February 1-5, 1993 at the New York State Education Department in Brooklyn. Training participants included the eight liaisons, two O.P.I. coordinators, and at least two presenters and/or consultants. On average, 15 people participated in each day's session.

Presenters included representatives from the BOE's Office of Community School District Affairs, the United Federation of Teachers (U.F.T.), and the New York State Education Department. Topics presented included:

- team-building skills,
- communication skills,
- P.A./P.T.A. roles and responsibilities,
- the New York City public educational system,
- school board elections, and
- the role of parents in S.B.M./S.D.M. "Action Planning".

The first session began with an introductory welcome by the director of O.P.I., Edna Suarez-Colomba, followed by a "team-building skill" presentation. This workshop generally focused on group dynamics and how to work in group settings. The last workshop session, "The Role of the P.A./P.T.A. in S.B.M./S.D.M.:

Action Planning," was presented by the U.F.T. Brooklyn Educational Liaison. The session started with a history and overview of S.B.M./S.D.M., followed by a question-and-answer period. A flow chart was distributed that showed the various steps involved in developing an action plan, including how to: 1) obtain the approval of staff, administration, and parents for S.B.M./S.D.M. in a school, 2) develop and write a plan, and 3) get technical assistance from the Board of Education. Moreover, additional materials and information on existing community resources were provided.

Evaluators felt that all presentations were clear. Liaisons received a good deal of information about ways in which to implement their tasks, and there were animated and dynamic discussions on issues related to each presentation.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Overview

As previously indicated, interviews were conducted and surveys were self-administered to determine the scope and nature of each site's program. Whereas all liaisons participated in the O.E.R. group interview, none of them returned their survey, and only five of the eight (63 percent) district/superintendency administrators completed and returned the O.E.R.-developed "Parent Involvement Survey", (see the appendix for a copy of this instrument). Therefore, the following section details the five responding sites' proposed program goals/objectives, and the liaisons' discussion of the activities they conducted to

implement their site's goals/objectives.

Program Scope

O.E.R. reviewed the five responding sites' proposals to determine the goals/objectives they planned to implement, Table 1 summarizes these data. Whereas all sites wanted to "assist and train P.A./P.T.A.s", the remaining R.F.P. goals/objectives were only targeted by one or two sites. Moreover, four of the five (80 percent) sites also planned to implement goals/objectives that were not contained in the R.F.P.: district B wanted to develop a model set of P.A./P.T.A. bylaws for use throughout the district, district C planned to establish a district lending library, district D wanted to establish a parents center at the district office, and district E wanted to establish more parent associations/groups, publish a parent newsletter, and train selected parents to become turn-key parent-trainers in methods of assisting their children in school.

Implementation Strategies and Activities

During the O.E.R. group interview the liaisons discussed the various strategies and activities they used to implement their site's goals/objectives. In order to establish more representative parent organizations, liaisons assisted and trained P.A./P.T.A.s, provided parents' with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation in their children's education, and made efforts to involve more parents.

Three liaisons organized workshops on leadership training skills, and educated parent organizations about the bylaw's which

Table 1

Summary of Respondents' Proposed Goals and Objectives*

Proposed Goal/Objective	District Codes					All Districts	
	A	B	C	D	E	N	%
Assist and train Parent Associations/Parent Teacher Associations	X	X	X	X	X	5	100
Help parents become knowledgeable about children's rights and responsibilities, and about the school system	X		X			2	40
Act as an ombudperson			X			1	20
Develop parents' skills				X	X	2	40
Promote collaboration between parents, teachers, and schools			X			1	20
Promote parent and community involvement in schools and districts	X		X			2	40
Inform parents of the availability of community resources				X		1	20

* This table displays the proposal goals/objectives that the five sites responding to the O.E.R. survey selected for implementation.

- All program sites (100 percent) wanted to assist and train Parent Associations/Parent Teacher Associations.

regulate the P.A./P.T.A.s, two liaisons organized workshops on how to involve parents, and two liaisons established Parent Resource Centers at their respective sites. Two liaisons indicated that they worked on the district-level with large parent organizations like the Parent Advisory Council and/or the Presidents' Council.*

Three parent liaisons talked about how they promoted collaboration between parents, teachers, and school staff, and between conflicting groups of parents within their district. During the O.E.R. group interview, one liaison stated, "the main activity of the parent liaison is mediation among different components of the school." Another detailed how she brought conflicting schools together in a meeting, "I got schools that hadn't talked to each other because of ethnic and racial differences . . . They didn't really communicate and it was amazing . . . By the end of that meeting they were all talking, they were laughing with each other, people were hugging each other as they went out."

In districts where there was a large immigrant student population, many liaisons were particularly concerned to reach parents/families whose primary language was not English. One liaison described how she functioned as an ombudsperson:

...with the non-English speaking parents who felt so lost,

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*The Presidents' Council is a parent group of all the P.A./P.T.A. presidents in a community school district or a superintendency; whereas, the Parent Advisory Council is a parent group in schools receiving federal funding for remedial assistance of low-income students.

> so out of the system. Most P.A.s . . . were very happy that these people did not understand what was going on. They did not try to explain it, they . . . just said, well "you don't understand English."

During the spring 1993 school board elections, all the liaisons were able to use the skills and knowledge that they received during the mandatory week of skill development training, by actively participating with the two O.P.I. coordinators in a voter registration drive prior to and during the elections.

PARTICIPANTS' PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

District/Superintendency Administrators' Assessment

Implementation of Goals/Objectives. A question on the district administrators' survey asked the respondents to select and rate up to three objectives that their site had implemented during the program year. The objectives were rated on a 6-point scale where "0" meant that the goal/objective was not implemented and "5" indicated that the goals/objective was 100 percent implemented (see question 14 on the survey in the appendix). The five administrators' responses are summarized in Table 2.

Of the six selected goals/objectives indicated on Table 2, five, (83.3 percent) had mean ratings of at least 4.0. The P.T.A./P.A. training and assistance goal/objective was selected by four of the five (80 percent) of the respondents. In addition, some administrators indicated that some of their site's original goals/objectives could not be implemented because of delays in resource development, i.e.--BOE P.T.A./P.A. guidelines, non-English language translation difficulties, etc. Other respondents indicated that implementation of such site-specific

TABLE 2*

SUMMARY OF THE LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR SELECTED GOALS/OBJECTIVES, BY DISTRICT/SUPERINTENDENCY

GOAL/OBJECTIVE	DISTRICTS' RATINGS[b] 1 N	1 %[c]	2 N	2 %[c]	3 N	3 %[c]	4 N	4 %[c]	5 N	5 %[c]	MEAN RATING	DISTRICTS THAT DID NOT SELECT OBJECTIVES N	DISTRICTS THAT DID NOT SELECT OBJECTIVES %[d]
Assist and train P.A./P.T.A.s	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	2	50.0	1	25.0	4.00	1	20
Help parents become knowledgeable about children's rights and responsibilities, and about the school system	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	4.00	3	60
Develop parents' skills	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	4.00	4	80
Promote collaboration between parents, teachers and school staff	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	4.00	4	80
Promote parent and community involvement in schools/districts	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	1	50.0	4.50	3	60
Inform parents of the availability of community resources	0	0.0	1	100	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2.00	4	80

* Five administrators responded to this open-ended O.E.R. questionnaire item which asked them to list and rate up to three of the goals/objectives that they implemented.

[b] The level of implementation was rated on a scale where "0" meant that the goal was not implemented, and "5" indicated 100 percent implementation.

[c] These percentages were based on the total number of respondents who selected 0-5 for each goal/objective.

[d] These percentages were based on the five administrators who responded to the O.E.R. questionnaire.

• Of the six selected goals/objectives, five, (83.3 percent), had mean ratings of at least 4.0.

goals/objectives as forming parent organizations and networks had gone very well, rated "4" and "5", respectively.

Program Improvement Recommendations. All of the district administrators commented that: a) there should be better communication between the districts and the Office of Parent Involvement on the training and other O.P.I. time demands for the liaison; b) liaisons should receive more training; c) O.P.I. should develop a better delineation of the liaisons' tasks; and d) liaisons should be more accountable to their districts/ superintendencies.

Liaisons' Perceptions

In O.E.R.'s focus group discussion, all eight liaisons reported some difficulties that they encountered in performing their tasks.

Building Credibility. All of the liaisons mentioned the distrust that they faced when they started their positions, saying that they were perceived as a "threat to the status quo." They felt that the most important issue was building credibility. One liaison commented "It does take a while to gain that trust. No matter what the R.F.P. said, I don't feel my role is really clarified." Another one said "You have to build your own credibility and that takes time. I think the first month, I had [won] that credibility with the P.A.C. and the P.A.'s presidents."

Being Visible at District Headquarters. For many liaisons the building of credibility implied being visible. During the

focus group discussion all the participants conveyed that they had to make themselves visible at the district site in order to gain peoples' confidence. Some of the liaisons even spoke of securing their right to exist. One of them commented, "Nobody on the third floor [of the district building] knows who I am. I mean, the superintendent knows and the people whom I have to deal with in my office know, but the district office as a whole has not begun to recognize us. They still see us as that troubleshooter." Still another vivid account: "I was definitely looked down upon for a couple of months; I had to get by it . . . At the beginning it was sink or swim on your own."

Working with Individual Parents and with Parent Groups. Although all liaisons stated that their past experience as parent leaders was an asset, at times it was a challenge to gain immediate trust. Many parents began to perceive them differently after they took the liaison position. One liaison stated,

> . . . they [other parents] saw us as threatening, as somebody who reports to higher authority. You have to make them understand that you are here as a resource to them, not trying to take over their organization . . . you are not a spy from the district office, you are there as a resource.

Another liaison commented, "You have to do it in a nice way so that the PTA president does not feel that you are stepping on his or her toes, that you are [not] taking power away from them." These moments of conflict could also emerge in interactions with school and district staff members.

Working with school and district staffs. Many liaisons described their unfriendly first encounters with school and

district staff. A liaison described the situation in these terms, "You just hope that the principal doesn't throw you out of the building . . . The principal wanted to come head to head with me. He actually jumped on me at the first principals' conference in the district."

These difficulties--in particular those created by staff members--were lessened if the liaison had the full support of the superintendent. This support was crucial for implementation. One liaison commented:

> . . . my superintendent made it very clear from the onset that this was something that he wanted and that "they" had to cooperate...I am not saying that everyone welcomed me with open arms...

Another liaison remarked, "then the principal doesn't [could not] throw you out of the building because he knows that the superintendent is standing behind you. You have much more credibility."

Resource Limitations. Liaisons' group interview responses also indicated that time and space were important factors preventing full achievement of their objectives. Many liaisons reported that finding a place to work was crucial. Many had to move from place to place in order to find a work space. One of them commented, "I literally for the first month and a half . . . was the bag lady. It took three months to get [access to a] computer".

All the liaisons agreed that it would have been more effective to start working in early September, at the beginning of the school year. The following two comments illustrate this

problem:

> I think it would have been helpful if [the program had started] in September because you would not be under this pressure for five months. I have to get all this done within five months.
>
> Do not decide to start in October or even November because the critical month for everything is September. It is when the kids are in there. And the parents and every PA president knows this. That is why most P.A.s have their candy sale or whatever big fundraising in September. As each week and day pass[es], the parents become less responsive. If you can grab the parents from the beginning, then you have a much...[better] chance of really having things grow and function.

Recommendations. All participants in the pilot program wanted program funding to continue and to make the liaison position permanent. One liaison summarized the issue in this way:

> I couldn't promise them anything except [that] whether I was refunded or not, I will be there to help. I mean, this is a commitment. This is not a job that lasts thirty-five hours a week because if--I am really sure I speak for everyone--we added up the time that we spend on telephone, all the meetings, even at the supermarket, it is a commitment. If the job was to go on--which I hope it does, [or] to expand, I hope it expands with the right person. It is imperative that it is someone that looks at it from a parent's point of view.

Program Impact

Both district administrators in the district survey and the liaisons during the group interview indicated that parent participation in three districts increased, including one district where the liaison said more P.A.s had been established. Three other liaisons stated that they had improved and expanded parent education and leadership skills. Four liaisons indicated that they improved communication between schools and parents, and informed and trained parents about the school system and the role

and responsibilities of P.A./P.T.A.s. Generally, in all the districts, liaisons fulfilled the most important goals and objectives that were detailed in their proposals.

District administrators' survey data also indicated that all the districts/superintendencies experienced a positive change in their parent involvement programs as a result of the liaison position. Two superintendents wrote that "the liaison was not only a valuable asset to the district, but was indeed the turnkey in promoting and influencing schools to share their resources." In one district a parent survey administered by the liaison indicated that 60 percent of the respondents thought that the liaison's job performance was excellent, 38 percent said it was good, and 99 percent stated that they could use the information given by the liaison to train more parents.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The District Parent Liaison Pilot program was a new Board of Education project which could and should evolve into a more complex and well-defined program. In spite of its newness, the program provided new opportunities to strengthen parents' participation in making important decisions about their children's education.

O.E.R.'s review of program documents, liaisons' group interview data, and analyses of survey responses indicated that the program was implemented as intended. The program varied from site to site in terms of objectives to be achieved and the activities implemented. The main criterion for success was the liaisons' capacity for establishing credibility in their positions. All the liaisons indicated that the position should be made permanent. Some even stated that in order to really achieve greater parent involvement, at least two liaisons should be hired in each district/superintendency in the school system.

O.E.R.'s overall findings confirm that, after a year of implementation, the Parent Liaison Pilot program was successful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these findings, O.E.R. recommends that O.P.I.:

- extend the liaison pilot program for the 1993-94 school year;
- provide more liaison training conferences;

- improve communication with districts and superintendencies regarding training and other O.P.I. time demands on the liaison; and

- develop a specific job description for the liaisons which includes their accountability to their district/ superintendency.